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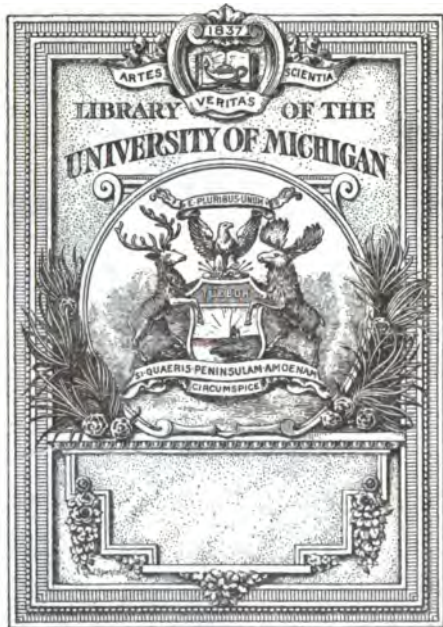
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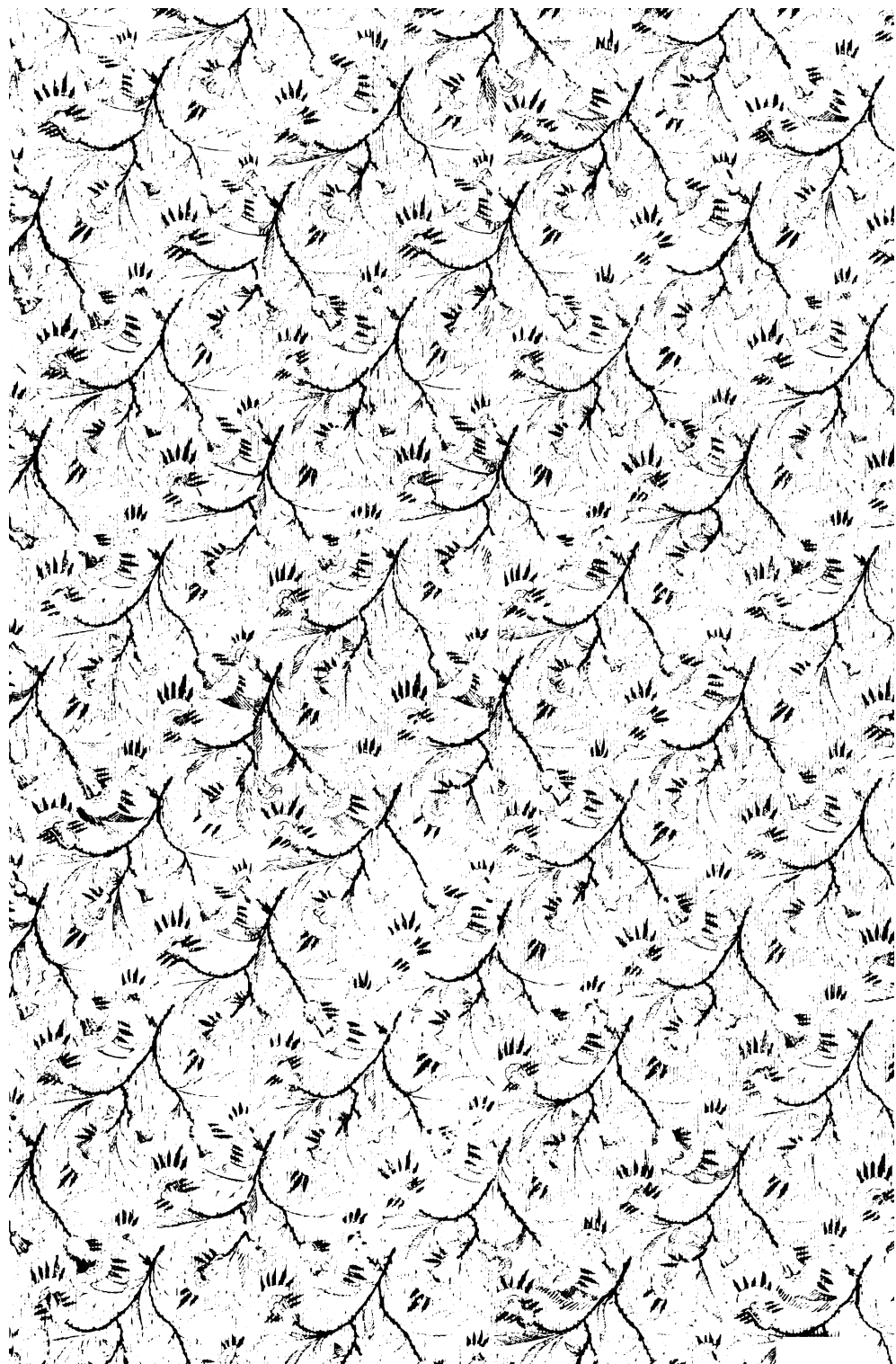
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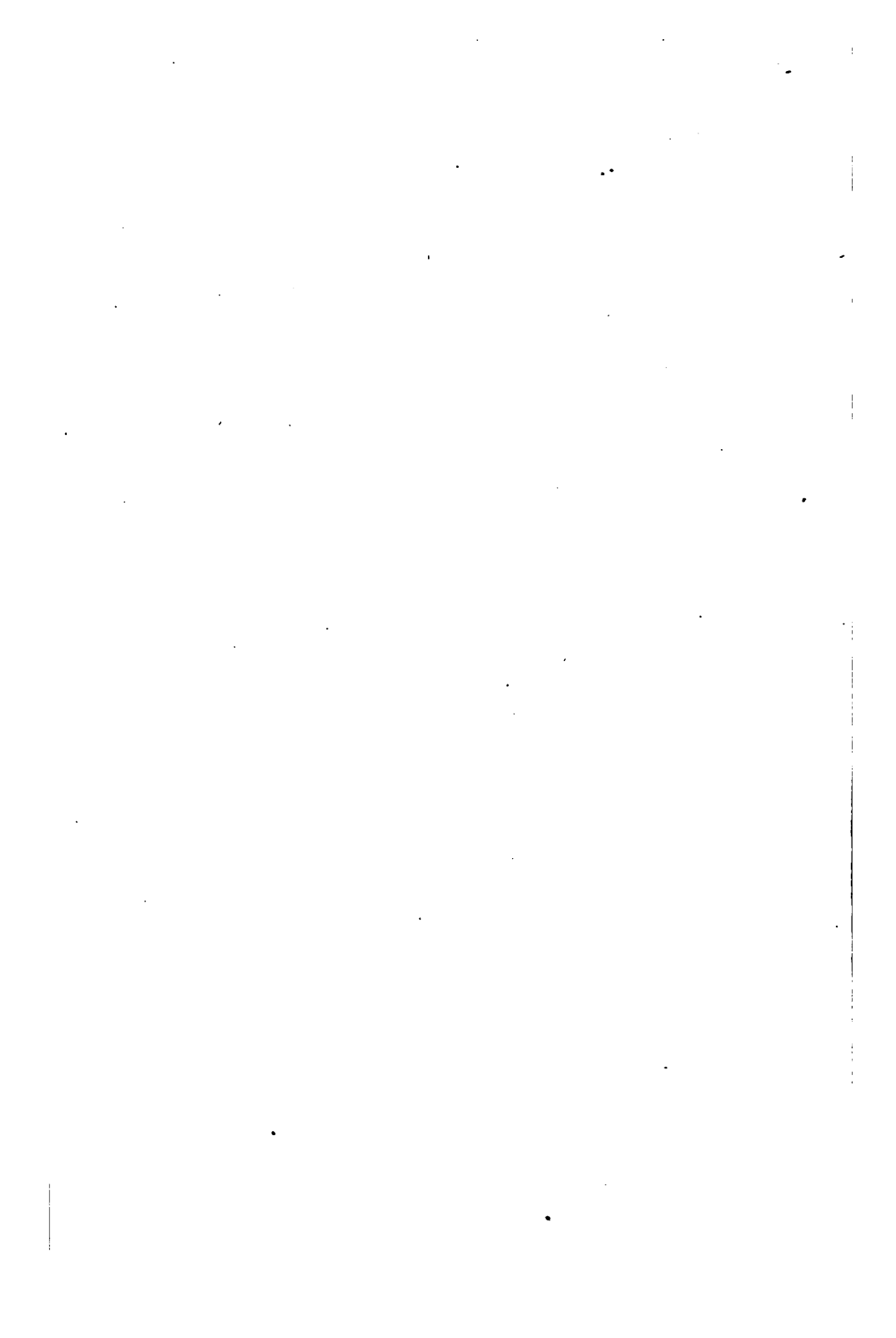
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A
COMPARISON, CRITICISM AND ESTIMATE
OF
THE ENGLISH NOVELISTS
FROM 1700 TO 1850

THE CHANCELLOR'S ESSAY
1894

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1700

A COMPARISON, CRITICISM AND ESTIMATE OF THE ENGLISH NOVELISTS

FROM 1700 TO 1850.

IN few departments of literature has England aught to fear from comparison with other nations. In pure poetry the names of Chaucer and Spenser, Milton, Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats, Tennyson and Browning represent a dower of fame of which any people might well be proud. In dramatic literature there has been found no peer to our great 'fancy's child,' and his glorious creations live on for the refreshing of the tired world. Perdita and Rosalind, Viola and Hermione, Portia and Miranda,—what a breath of sweet thoughts each name brings with it, how marvellously do they dominate our conceptions, real as memories of real women. And if the shadows are there—and the men are mostly in shadow,—how wondrously are they wrought to teach the glory of the light. Shakespeare stands alone: yet we have no ignoble band behind him: Marlowe and Jonson, Goldsmith and Sheridan, rank high among the world's dramatic authors, and we have at any rate one living writer who, by more modern but no less artistic methods, attains results in some ways comparable.* In the domain of history we can shew besides Macaulay some illustrious names. And if in philosophic literature we are less pre-eminent, yet the country that produced Bacon and Berkeley, as well as Hobbes and Bentham, Hume and Mill, need not herein either be ashamed.

But it is in the domain of the novel that England is perhaps most clearly supreme. We must start by ascertaining the meaning of our term, but although it is generally felt that Johnson's definition is no longer satisfactory, the word is certainly not easy to define afresh. Perhaps for present purposes the art of the novelist may be considered as *The prose portrayal of life and character through plot*.† If it be objected that the definition here suggested makes no mention of the passion of love, about which the novel is almost

* The author of *The Profligate* and *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*. Who that saw the great scene between Miss Kate Rorke and Mr. Forbes Robertson, was not stirred by feelings at least commensurable in kind with those excited by *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*?

† More fully *The prose portrayal of life and character through the medium of a chain of events more or less imaginary*.

invariably wrought,* we would urge that, inasmuch as that passion is one of the greatest influences in the life and on the character that is to be portrayed, it is virtually implied in the definition. Nevertheless it must be borne in mind that it is undoubtedly to the passion of love that the novel owes alike its origin, its development and its sway over men's thought.

Love in our sense was impossible to the Greek, as friendship in the Greek sense is difficult to us. The sole duty of the Athenian's wife was to be the pleasure of her husband, and the mother of the children that always took precedence in his thoughts and his affections. Woman had to be raised by Christianity before love became possible. Perhaps in no way can we see more clearly the gulf that separates the modern from the ancient world than by trying to find in the latter's literature parallel passages to the love-making, we will not say of Romeo and Juliet, but even of Perdita and Florizel, or Ferdinand and her whose memory is now fresh with us at Oxford. Search the rich casket of antiquity, and we find gems indeed; Hector's parting from Andromache, Ulysses and Nausicaa, Penelope and her returned husband: but beautiful as these are—singularly beautiful and attractive to us for their simple *naïveté* of feeling—there is yet always something lacking, and even for them we have been forced to resort to Homer, in whose age it would seem that women occupied a higher position than in later classical times.† Most passages in Greek, still more in Roman, literature, that treat of love, are alien to modern feeling, and even Antigone is disfigured by utilitarian sophistry.‡

Chivalry, that attractive child of Christianity and barbarism, first found serious literary voice in the narratives of the *trouvères*, which, transformed into the long French

* Mr. Stopford Brooke's definition is "a story wrought round the passion of love to a tragic or joyous conclusion." But (a) is it not alien to usage to exclude such works as *The Master of Ballantrae*, where there is no love interest, from the name of novel? (b) Is not the last half of the definition both redundant and untrue?—In other words a story must have a conclusion: is there anything in the idea of *novel* which excludes the story whose conclusion is not distinctly either joyous or tragic? Is—to take the first instance that suggests itself to the writer's mind—the thoughtful story *Ships that pass in the night* disinherited of its title of novel because of its termination? Rather, as it is hard to tell whether life is more joyous or sad, should not the same be true of the novel which presents life,—both in its course and its conclusion?

† See Jebb. *Introd. to Homer*.

‡ If, as is now largely conceded, the lines referred to are genuine. [Oddly enough this very evening (June 4) on which I am correcting the proofs, I have heard an almost identical argument used in a Drogheda circus dialogue.]

prose romances of the sixteenth century,* were the real origin of the modern novel. The word novel indeed, is derived from the Italian light *novelle* of the type of the *Decamerone*, while the word romance (from the language in which this kind of literature first appeared) has been appropriated to the more serious or more remote type of love-story. For practical purposes, however, the former term may well be taken to include both the lighter and the more serious sides of fiction. Of this form of art in our own country Sidney's *Arcadia* and the great *Utopia* of More were in some sort the precursors; but the man whom it has rightly become the custom to regard as the first English novelist, is the inimitable and unamiable author of *Robinson Crusoe*. For even our broad definition of the novel will scarcely include Bunyan's grand allegory, nor the satirical narrative of poor savage Swift.

DANIEL DEFOE† was a Londoner of low descent who inherited Whig principles. He had been brought up to be a dissenting minister, but grew to find thoughts of his intended profession distasteful to him; although in many of his writings is to be found a sanctimonious vein, which may perhaps be attributed to his early training. He seems to have begun his life with fair and honourable ambitions; and so convinced a Whig was he then that he actually joined Monmouth's insurrection.‡ But as years went on, repeated failure appears to have played havoc with a character deficient in strength; and his whole life-history is one of moral deterioration. He engaged in various businesses,—among them hosiery and tile-making,—with varying success, having been, he tells us, 'thirteen times rich and poor.' He was pilloried, and twice imprisoned in Newgate, for political offences. His tract on *The shortest way with the Dissenters*, which, in a spirit of bitter satire, inculcated extermination as the best mode of dealing with his co-religionists, was at first taken seriously by the high church party, and by their opponents. Thus, as he says of himself, he became

' Embroiled with State to do his friends no good,
And by his friends themselves misunderstood.'

It was his editorship of the *Review*, a semi-political, semi-literary magazine, appearing thrice a week,—the prototype of such papers as our *Spectator*,—that chiefly brought him into trouble. Under the influence of misfortune he had recourse to base means of obtaining a livelihood; not only changing sides more than once, but doing so without divulg-

* Such as are caricatured in *Don Quixote*.

† 1661–1731. His name is more correctly spelt De Foe.

‡ For which offence he succeeded in evading punishment.

ing the fact ; and so receiving pay from the Tories for emasculating Whig journals, of which he remained on the staff, by substituting for political articles weak padding of society small-talk. The man, too, who could condescend to pander to the public taste for police news as he perpetually did,* or to receive money for such a shameless puff as that which he wrote to facilitate the sale of *Drelincourt on Death*,† cannot have been a man of much principle. He however did good work as confidential agent in Edinburgh in the negotiations that preceded the union with Scotland, and it must be admitted that, whether in the defence of William III.,‡ or in his attacks on existing injustice, his voice—at any rate when it paid him—was generally heard on the right side. But whatever may be said of his character, of his genius only those who have formed some acquaintance with that amazing versatility which poured out satires, pamphlets, journals, narratives and novels—all so surprisingly vigorous—in unexampled profusion, can have any idea.

Of his many novels none approaches in interest the immortal *Robinson Crusoe*. That it has become a national work is no doubt partly due to its subject. The idea of a man combating with success all the forces of nature is just as distinctively English, as the idea of Ulysses suffering with equanimity his woeful wanderings as the plaything of the gods, was distinctively Greek. But it must also be largely attributable to the simple vigour of its conception, the careful realism of its execution, and the charm of its style. The other novels *Colonel Jack*, *Moll Flanders*, *Captain Singleton*, &c., are mainly lives of thieves and outcasts. Defoe was possessed of a thorough sympathy with low life: the refuse of society had a fascination for him: he had well used his opportunities in Newgate and elsewhere. He knew the public taste for the details of criminal life, and one of his secrets of literary success was no doubt his determination always to write well down to the taste of his readers. Such a novel as *Moll Flanders* deals with the sore of society in very much the spirit of M. Zola and his followers. Defoe lays bare the career of an abandoned woman, concealing nothing, extenuating nothing, but also hoping nothing. It could only be when inspired by the hope of amelioration,

* He interviewed several criminals before execution and published the results in popular pamphlets.

† *The Apparition of Mrs. Veal*. The sale of the book mentioned in the text hanging fire, Defoe was commissioned to write an account, wholly imaginary but pretending to be real, of the appearance of the ghost of a Mrs. Veal to another lady, to whom it recommended Drelincourt's book.

‡ *E.g.* in *The True-born Englishman*.

that such a narrative could be enduring. But Defoe's novel is inspired merely by hope of the good sale which of course it achieved: the morbid way in which he, like M. Zola, lingers over disgusting detail, and the perfunctory manner in which any necessary pieces of morality are introduced, preclude us from attributing any moral purpose to a vivid and clever, but most revolting novel. Nor are Defoe's other heroes and heroines much more attractive than *Moll Flanders*, and the fact that their vices, if not reprehended, are at least not painted in pleasing lines, may perhaps be set down to the author's good account,—if we prefer to ascribe it to an instinctive morality rather than to a certain want of imagination very noticeable in Defoe. His view of life, as exemplified not only in his novels but in his career, was vitiated by the theory that a man was justified in doing *anything* rather than starve. Considered as works of art his novels are, with the exception of the first part of *Robinson Crusoe* wanting in unity, inclined to be episodic, and generally in composition somewhat crude. The English in which they are written is consistently terse, vivid and manly, and has betrayed many critics into the belief that the character of the author of *Robinson Crusoe* was as simple as his style.

Before leaving him we may remark a striking difference between Defoe and succeeding novelists. They wrote avowedly fiction: Defoe always took the greatest possible pains to pretend that he was writing fact. He represents a transition from narrative history to imaginative romance: he has been well called the greatest master of the art of circumstantial lying that ever lived.*

The next great name in the history of the English novel is that of SAMUEL RICHARDSON,† in whose hands that form of art gained much in subtlety and elaboration. His life was uneventful: if Defoe's has been seen to have been an interesting failure, Richardson's must be confessed to have all the dullness of a *bourgeois* success. Born of humble country parents, he came up to a London printer's, where he became 'the industrious apprentice' personified. By gradual steps he rose to be First Printer of the Journals of the House of Commons, and Master of the Stationers' Company. Making his fortune, he at length retired to the suburb of Parson's

* e.g. *The Journal of the Plague year* is written as if an authentic description by an eyewitness: the details are, as is well-known, of the most graphic and circumstantial character, given with those innumerable little realistic touches so dear to the heart of Defoe. The book is really a hoax: its author was but a baby at the time of the events recorded. Cf. also the *Memoirs of a Cavalier*. See Prof. Minto's *Life*.

† 1689—1761.

Green, where he trifled out the remainder of his life, surrounded by sentimental old ladies.

It is hard for us now to appreciate—for the 19th is in some respects more alien in sympathy to the 18th than it is to most preceding centuries—the flutter of excitement caused in 1740 by the publication of *Pamela*. This long drawn-out tale of the trials of a poor country girl, who enters a rich man's service, resists his advances, and is duly rewarded with ultimate matrimony, now retains scarcely more than historical interest. Its patient detail and minute, though superficial, analysis, are alike unattractive to those trained in modern methods of thought. More interesting, as artistically more perfect, was his second no less elaborate work *Clarissa Harlowe*, the story of the successful seduction of the heroine by the brilliant and unprincipled Lovelace, a name that has since been proverbial. His third novel *Sir Charles Grandison* followed in 1753. As Richardson had risen in the ranks, so duly and gradually did the personages of his novels. *Pamela* had been a tale of the lower classes, *Clarissa Harlowe* of the middle, while *Sir Charles Grandison* essayed to be as correct a portraiture of the aristocratic orders of society. But the latter novel is generally confessed a comparative failure: the author was out of his element, and his consciousness of the fact made him strain after fine language and become stilted and a prey to affectation, while the characters fail to engage our sympathy.

The morbid effeminacy and trivial exactitude of Richardson, must not blind us to his genuine gift of pathos and the sterling pioneer's work done by him towards the truthful portrayal of human character by deft allusive touches. He utilized the epistolary form, which he always adopted, to bring out by means of a thousand subtle strokes, with all the patience of a Dutch painter, the details of the character which he depicts: he was deficient in breadth of view and manliness of thought, and somewhat prone to namby-pamby sentiment.

FIELDING* presents many contrasts to his predecessor. Of illustrious descent, the son of General Fielding, he was educated at Eton, and thence proceeded, as was then the fashion, to study law at Leyden. Recalled from that university by the death of his father, who left him virtually unprovided for, he began his career by contributing to the *Covent Garden Journal*, and was the author of some not very successful dramatic works. Always a favourite in society, of which he was passionately fond, he married an amiable and wealthy widow, but had soon, through his extravagance

* 1707—1754.

and unsuccessful speculations, spent all the fortune he had thus acquired. He resumed his old profession of the law, but met with no success. He next wrote pamphlets on the Liberal side. It was only after these failures that he at length found his true vocation as a novelist.* He died at the age of 46 in the city of Lisbon, whither he had been obliged to go, to endeavour to renovate a constitution ruined by intermittent excess in work and pleasure.

His first work, *Joseph Andrews*, intended as a partial parody of *Pamela*, grew into a great original work of genius. To the fact of its intentional caricature is owed the main position; the virtuous person's resistance of the seducer,—the genders being in Fielding humorously reversed: for the rest Fielding's book owes nothing positively or negatively to Richardson's. No character in Richardson comes within measurable distance of the delightful Parson Adams. Nor is it only in characterisation that the younger novelist excels. In leaving Richardson for Fielding we breathe at once a healthier and freer atmosphere. A somewhat old-maidish prying into the secrets of the boudoir is exchanged for a manly facing of the facts of existence; minute analysis of sentiment and costume for masterly treatment of whole aspects of life and whole phases of character.† *Jonathan Wild*, his next production, being the career of a housebreaker and highwayman, affords an interesting parallel and contrast to Defoe's somewhat similar work, but while the earlier writer confined himself to the vigorous narration of crimes and adventures as thrilling and *vraisemblables* as possible, Fielding writes throughout in a vein of racy sarcasm, ironically praising every atrocity committed by a hero in whom the vices that bring popular fame are mercilessly satirised.

His last work, *Amelia*, the tale of the heroine's long-suffering love for that unconscionable scoundrel Captain Booth, need not detain us as we pass to the consideration of its predecessor, undoubtedly the masterpiece of Fielding, and, in the opinion of no few critics, the greatest novel the world has seen,—that most exhilarating of books, *Tom Jones*. It is in many ways an ideal work of art; character drawing, plot, incident, approach perfection, the whole enwrapped with a genial philosophic humour that is positively refreshing.

* His wife having died, he married her maid, with whom he appears to have been happy.

† Dr. Johnson's dictum as to "more knowledge of the heart in one letter of Richardson's than in all *Tom Jones*" is surely one of the most infelicitous of his criticisms and may be confidently left to the refutation of the modern reader.

We should have far to seek for characters so life-like and vivid, drawn with a touch at once so firm and light, as the weak hero, the fair Sophia, the sneaking Blifil and the brutal Squire Western. The morality—in the restricted sense—of *Tom Jones* is not above that of its age. There can, despite the arguments of cynic and sensualist, be little doubt that for at least the last two centuries there has been a fairly continuous advance in our ideas of the relations of man and woman.* Hamlet uses to Ophelia expressions such as no lowest artisan of to-day would dream of using to the girl he loved. Swift, Defoe, Fielding, Smollett, and Sterne contain passages which, had they lived in our time, they would never have dreamed of writing. The views of *Tom Jones*' epoch on the sexual relations were in some respects lax, and the laxity is reflected in the novel. More than that, scenes are openly described which modern taste would prefer to leave to be hinted at. With regard to the first point, Fielding can hardly be blamed for not outstripping the morality of his time: the second is, in Fielding's hands, really a very forgivable fault. If he is indecent, his is a frank and honest indecency; a sheer healthy animalism that cannot be very severely reprovéd. *Tom Jones* must ever remain a great achievement, and its author retain a place in the very fore-front of English men of letters: nor only is he artistically great; for, despite occasional coarseness, the whole feeling of his books is good and pure and true; and there is a breezy charitableness about him that may well cover a multitude of sins.

Fielding had created in his masterpiece a type to which all subsequent novelists were more or less obliged to conform: in subordination of incident and thought to one general scheme, as in the perfection to which all three were carried, *Tom Jones* stands alone. From so high a level deterioration was all but necessary.

It shewed itself in the—in many respects admirable—works of SMOLLETT.† He was a Scotchman, by some fourteen years junior to Fielding, and was educated at Dumbarton and the University of Glasgow. Apprenticed to a doctor of his university town, he soon grew tired of the life, and when only nineteen set out for London with a tragedy called *The Regicide* in his pocket. Failing in attempts to produce this work, he relapsed for a time into practice of the healing art, becoming surgeon's mate on board a man of war. After

* Whether practice has improved with theory may of course be doubted: practice will no doubt in the matter always lag behind the theory: but it seems alien to common sense to suppose that an improved theory must not to some extent improve the practice.

† 1721—1771.

living for some years in the West Indies, he returned to London, where he pursued his chirurgic and literary labours. He suffered imprisonment for his strictures on the navy: his health, like Fielding's, broke down before 50, and, like his great predecessor, he died abroad, having in vain sought health under the sunny skies of Leghorn.

His first novel, *Roderick Random*, at once revealed the vein in which he intended to work, his merits and limitations. His retrogression from the point reached by *Tom Jones* very largely consists in the inferior artistic unity that he was content to attain. His object was simply to amuse, and he could seldom resist the temptation of exciting laughter, even by an anecdote or an incident that delayed the march of the plot. The great subordination of material to design, of 'the many' to 'the one,' magnificently achieved by Fielding, was by Smollett scarcely even sought. Nor was it only the coherence of the plot that Smollett allowed to be injured by humorous excrescence: the consistency of his characters was equally sacrificed to ludicrous effect.* *Roderick Random* himself is an eminently inconsistent character. In 1751 came the amusing *Peregrine Pickle* and two years later *Ferdinand Count Fathom*, whose villainous hero may be with advantage compared to the Captain Singleton of Defoe and the Jonathan Wild of Fielding: if Smollett's book shews a livelier play of fancy, a power of more complex characterisation, and far more humorous ingenuity, than Defoe's, it on the other hand lacks Fielding's firm grasp of the reins of the imagination, and his rarely equalled sense of proportion. In 1755 Smollett had been engaged on a translation of Don Quixote, and the idea suggested itself to him of adapting the masterpiece of Cervantes to the circumstances of his own time and country. The result, *Sir Launcelot Greaves*, failed through inefficient execution of a not particularly happy idea.

It was at Leghorn, when life and its pleasures were leaving him, and he watched the slow feet of death, that Smollett gave the world certainly his best novel, *Humphry Clinker*. Personally the writer has always been inclined to quarrel with the epistolary form, especially when used with such an involved and confusing result as in the novel with which we are now dealing. At the same time the method

* It is perhaps worth noticing in this connection the way in which Smollett in *Humphry Clinker* perpetually tries to raise a laugh by his most illegitimate employment of ludicrous spelling. In the letters referred to, inasmuch as he is writing in the character of a maid-servant, he is of course quite entitled to bad spelling, and to an occasional humorous effect therefrom: but Smollett's spelling is quite unjustifiable. He represents Mrs. Jenkins, while spelling hard words right, as making the most impossible mistakes over easy words, whenever a comic result is attainable.

has its advantages, and Smollett shews by its means extraordinary aptitude in writing in character. The language is outspoken, the humour at times coarse, and always somewhat superficial; but for all that it is a brilliant and entertaining work, and we leave Aunt Tabitha with her desire to be "more occumenical than ever," and that crab-apple* husband of hers with unfeigned regret.

The great Doctor's moral tale *Rasselas*, containing as it does so much of the moral and so little of the tale, hardly calls here for more than passing mention. But the same year 1759 in which it appeared saw also the publication of the first part of the *Tristram Shandy* of Laurence Sterne.†

STERNE was born in Ireland and educated at Cambridge: he entered the Church and obtained livings at Sutton and Coxwold. The success of *Tristram Shandy* rendered its hero a social favourite in London, and contributed to spoil a character, whose extreme selfishness was but thinly veiled by a picturesque sentimentalism and a gift of eccentric humour. He died in lonely wretchedness; a broken down *roué*.

Besides his *Sermons*, *Tristram Shandy* and its continuation the *Sentimental Journey*, are virtually his only works. It was the fantastic unconventionality of Sterne that attracted the public taste: of plot his books shew little trace, but interest is retained by truly brilliant characterisation and diverting incident. He borrowed freely, and without acknowledgment, from older humourists: his pathos is often strained and theatrical, falser than that of Dickens at his worst. He is the most indecent of all contemporary novelists, perpetually delighting in obscene suggestion, far more odious and not less hurtful than the outspokenness of Fielding or the coarseness of Smollett. In his stories Sterne loves to figure as the sentimental Yorick, on whom, and on that wonderful creation Uncle Toby, his creative genius is most finely exercised. The *Sentimental Journey* shews an unusual freedom from insular prejudice and an admiration for France which might have been expected from the author's habits of thought and life. Despite their faults, his writings are attractive from their vivacity, their brilliant portraiture, and the eccentric quaintness of a style in which τὸ ἀπροσδόκητον is a prominent feature.

* 'Then she opened her batteries on an old weather-beaten Scots lieutenant called Lismahago, who joined us at Durham and is I think one of the most singular persons I ever encountered. His manner is as harsh as his countenance, but I have often met with a crab-apple in a hedge, which I have been tempted to eat for its flavour even while I was disgusted by its austerity.' *Humphry Clinker*.

† 1713—1768.

To those weary of Sterne's affectedly erudite humour and exaggerated sentiment, no more welcome relief could be imagined than a dip into the fresh simplicity of the *Vicar of Wakefield*. GOLDSMITH* was, like Sterne, of Irish birth; and never was man more thoroughly or persistently Irish. At Trinity College, Dublin, he had distinguished himself only by his irregular conduct. He had been tutor in an Irish family, had, in his *dilletante* way, studied medicine in Edinburgh. He had made continental tours, during which he supported himself mainly by his flute, and then for some years drifted about from one vocation to another, now a chemist's shopman in London, now an usher at a school, more generally a book-seller's hack. When he was 36 the publication of the *Traveller* secured his immediate popularity and unquestioned literary eminence, although his wonderful improvidence kept him always poor. He died deeply mourned by a wide circle of distinguished friends, who forgave him his indolence, his petulant vanity and almost irritating generosity for his many attractive personal qualities. Attacks have been made on Goldsmith as unworthy of the indulgence of his friends: it has been said that he was as insincere and untrustworthy as he was indolent. But after all 'a good tree brings forth good fruit,' and no man could have written the exquisite idyll of the *Vicar of Wakefield*, whose heart, however overgrown with weaknesses and vanities, was not essentially good and true.

The *Vicar* is a priceless possession, a κτῆμα εἰς αἰεὶ that time has not been able to wither nor custom stale. It is unique, holding a place quite by itself, unlike any other book in the English language. Nowhere else can be found so felicitous a union of simple wisdom and kindly humour; its tender and delicate pathos, its quiet fun, its perfect purity of word and thought, render Goldsmith's one novel a gem of priceless worth. Add to this the charm of a style absolutely unmatched; rapid and clear as a mountain brook, the pebbles of whose bed glow not more brightly beneath it than glows each bright thought of the author beneath the limpid flow of his fresh and refreshing English. Dear weak Dr. Primrose and his narrow-minded wife are entirely delightful and consistent characters, and every person in the tale, the unfortunate Olivia and her sister, Mr. Burchell, the foolish Moses, and the rest, are portrayed with an artful artlessness rarely if ever surpassed. Who can wonder that Maclise seized that delightful scene of the country games at Farmer Flam-borough's, interrupted by the arrival of Mistress Wilhelmina Skeggs, for one of his most famous pictures, or that Moses at

* 1728—1774.

the fair, and Mr. Burchell's 'Fudge,' have become with us household words and familiar thoughts? As a personal preference, even above the cited incidents the writer would, for vivacity and restrained humour, place the account of the adventure of Dr. Primrose when he himself undertook the sale of his remaining horse.

The main, we may almost say the only, defect, in this most fascinating of fictions, is the undeniable weakness of the plot, which indeed towards the close becomes almost ludicrous. It is a serious blemish; but at least the author sins in good company: there is certainly nothing worse in the *Vicar of Wakefield* than Claudio's repentance and rapid false marriage in *Much Ado About Nothing*, which yet remains one of the supreme attainments of human genius. When all is said, the charm of Goldsmith's novel survives criticism and defies analysis: so long as the English language is understood, will this simple story of village life draw laughter and tears from a thankful people.

Three years before the death of Goldsmith,* WALTER SCOTT† had been born at Edinburgh. His career was uneventful, two things only calling for mention; his retirement from poetical success at the greater success of Byron, and his heroic attempt to pay off, by the most strenuous literary labour, gigantic liabilities in which business speculations had involved him.

Scott is the first great representative of what is known as the Romantic School. Time was ripe for a revolt from the pseudo-classicism born of the renaissance. The cry was raised for a return to nature: a desire arose for the sight and joy of nature as she is, and a distaste for the spectacles of classic pedantry through which it had so long been the custom—especially of poets—to regard her. The smooth ingenuities of Pope had grown insipid, and England was become as weary of the imitation classics that tried to stifle her literature, as of the pillars duly Doric or Ionic that sprinkled her lawns with their idiotic temples. The age of Jonson, Dryden, and Pope, was gone: the age of Scott and Dickens, Wordsworth and Tennyson, was about to come.

It was not only classic manner but classic matter that Scott discarded: the *Reliques* turned his thoughts to stores as rich and more congenial. His ballad poetry, written at intervals between the years 1805 and 1814, was the result.

* In the interval must be noted, if only for the immense popularity they enjoyed, Horace Walpole's theatrical *Castle of Otranto*, and Miss Burney's somewhat oppressively feminine *Evelina*.

† 1771—1832.

In the latter year his first great novel *Waverley* was given to the public. Thenceforward until his death in 1852 the 'Wizard of the North' worked unremittingly at his wonderful series of romances, one following another with amazing rapidity and yet more amazing consistency of merit.

Scott was a romanticist heart and soul. If he left the England and Scotland of his time, it was but to seek nobler persons and apparently nobler eyes for his portrayal. He has Shakespeare's own gift for getting at the true spirit of past centuries. His detail is not indeed always microscopically correct. Neither was Shakespeare's. No writer, as no artist, was ever truly great who has not soared above the fear of a possible anachronism. Archaeological accuracy is seldom either sought or obtained by original genius. But if the mere archaeologist* can pick holes in Scott's historical detail, the true historian will recognize in him as fine and as imaginative an insight into the essential characteristics of the ages which he represents, as in the author of *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar*.

With, however, two limitations: In the first place the very uprightness and nobility of Scott's character militated against a sufficiently comprehensive view of human life, its glory and its shame. If the ideal judge should, according to Plato (unlike the ideal doctor) be personally without experience of the evils he is to remedy, it would on the other hand seem true that the ideal author must not be of a character so noble as to be above the sins and the temptations of ordinary men. Fielding was called by Byron the "prose Homer of human nature" because his own weaknesses, repentance, and effort had taught his genius a wide sympathy with the just and the unjust, the noble and the base. And so it was with Shakespeare, and in later times with Dickens and with Browning. When Scott walks with men in character and station beneath himself, there is always the least suspicion of spectral stilts.

His other limitation was a certain, if we may use the word, externality. The reader is never on more than speaking terms with Scott's characters: they are not among his friends, he does not know Rose Bradwardine as he knows Hetty Sorel. They are very noble and chivalrous these lords and dames, very picturesque these quaint retainers, but somehow they seem to want the intimate touch that lays bare their true natures to us. We see their actions and their clothes, their manners and main motives, but are not sufficiently enabled to realize themselves. Herein Scott had but the

* Here as elsewhere a verbal emendation or material suggestion of Prof. Palgrave's, offered in the kindest manner, has been gratefully used by the writer.

defects of his qualities; had he pierced more deeply through the surface of life, he could hardly have described that fair-seeming surface with such a glow of contented admiration; had he entered the very temple of the soul, he could not have paused to tell us of the glories of the ante-chamber. We do not ask of a Velasquez the wealth and depth of the idealism of a Watts, nor do we ask of the latter the vigorous realism of the former painter: rather we gather from each with gratefulness the fruit of his gifts. So are we well content that the great northern novelist should make no subtle analysis of character, but should take a somewhat external view of the noble things and noble thoughts of which he writes so nobly.

We may doubt whether a finer historical novel than *Ivanhoe* will ever be given us: the vigour and dignity of every page, the indescribable atmosphere of romance that wraps the whole, its sustained and dramatic interest, render it one of the great masterpieces of fiction. And what a grand series is it that presses in its train, *Waverley*, *Kenilworth*, *The Talisman*, *Rob Roy*, and *Old Mortality*, to mention but a few of the familiar names. Nor is it only in the type of novel which Scott made peculiarly his own that he excels. To some readers the romantic story, skilful portraiture, and pleasant humour of the *Antiquary* render it even more attractive than the most splendid of the author's historical efforts; and scarcely less delightful are the *Pirate* and *Guy Mannering*.

Of blemishes in Scott, as distinct from limitations, if mention should be made, such must be accounted his occasional carelessness in the construction of plot, his tendency to exaggerate the picturesque peculiarities of his characters, and his fondness for able and enthusiastic, but over lengthy, descriptions of natural scenery, such as may well weary many a reader who finds no weariness in not less lengthy passages of Wordsworth. Nor is his style, though combining stateliness and vigour, altogether above criticism: it shews occasional carelessness; it is somewhat cumbrous even when compared with that of Fielding, while contrasted with Goldsmith's it lacks brightness and simplicity. Such, however, are but specks upon the genius of one who is in many respects the brightest literary sun of the present century.

A succession of lady novelists must now be recorded. Half the uncomplaining contentment and quiet usefulness of woman is generally considered due to her usual freedom from originality. In few sciences or arts has she excelled: the woman philosopher or woman logician is almost a contradiction in terms, while of the arts it is in few that she has attained to excellence. In the art of painting the female

student's combination of technical skill with imaginative vacuity has become a bye-word; in music there has been no woman Beethoven, Handel or Mendelssohn: in poetry there were some two thousand lean years between Sappho and Mrs. Browning. But in the novelist's art at any rate woman has triumphed: the affairs of the heart she thinks legitimately fall to her *ménage* and has nobly asserted her right to their literary treatment.

Born four years later than Scott, JANE AUSTEN* produced five novels that within the narrow limits which she set herself are simply incomparable. Commonplace tales of commonplace people, they are raised by their most commonplace treatment to the level of works of genius. *Sense and Sensibility* may be taken as a fair example of her power at its best. How admirably is the contrast between the 'sense' of the one sister and the 'sensibility' of the other brought out, and nevertheless how admirably natural both are: with what facility are the personalities of the various men and women drawn,—the cheery brainless athleticism of the Squire and the cruel colourlessness of his wife, the good-natured foolishness of Mrs. Jennings, the unutterable meanness of Lucy Steele (who however just keeps on the right side of the border of possibility), the callous selfishness of Mr. and Mrs. John Dashwood, and the fond affection of the heroines' mother. Especially noticeable is the brilliant, if somewhat caustic, wit which glows throughout the work†; a sarcasm almost Tacitean in its keen incisiveness. If fault is to be found, it will be with the not very skilful handling of the plot in the second half of the novel, (which seems markedly inferior to the first), and with the somewhat unconvincing character—or want of character—of Marianne's first lover. But, considered as a whole, for vivid portraiture of a certain phase of life, *Sense and Sensibility* can scarcely be excelled.

Miss Ferrier, whose Scotch stories won the approbation

* 1775—1817.

† It is difficult to resist quoting a few lines from the description of life at Barton Park. "The Middletons lived in a style of equal hospitality and elegance. The former was for Sir John's gratification, the latter for that of his lady. . . . Sir John was a sportsman, Lady Middleton a mother. He hunted and shot, and she humoured the children; and these were their only resources. Lady Middleton had the advantage of being able to spoil her children all the year round, while Sir John's independent employments were in existence only half the time." Again: Marianne sings. "Sir John was loud in his admiration of every song and as loud in his conversation . . . while every song lasted. Lady Middleton frequently called him to order, wondered how anyone's attention could be diverted from the music for a moment, and asked Marianne to sing a particular song which Marianne had just finished."

of no less a person than Sir Walter, worked in much the same field, though with less artistic results. Nor must Miss Mitford, the writer of the delightful pastoral *Our Village*, remain unnoticed.*

Of wide influence in her day, but now fallen out of fashion, was the clever and refined Miss EDGEWORTH,† authoress of moral stories and of sketches of Irish character. In her works we find the first notable instance of what has come to be called the 'novel with a purpose.' Such novels are not now in vogue. It is become usual to sneer at plays or poems or novels 'with a purpose,' and to assert that the artist—we use the word in its widest sense—must not intrude into the domain of the preacher or the philosopher. It will be advisable to consider this position for a few seconds.

Art may perhaps be defined as *The expression of man through the medium of the beautiful*. Now if any non-hedonistic conception of the end be taken,—the welfare of the race, the promotion of virtue, or (to use religious phraseology) the labour as fellow-workers with God to bring about His kingdom,—must we not logically regard that man the greatest or the noblest who most realises that end, those thoughts the loftiest that most make for that ideal? Given, then, two artists, whether in prose or verse, painting or music, who appeal with equal success to the sense of beauty, it must surely be conceded that that one is the greater who gives expression to the greater thoughts.

Of the all-importance of the appeal to the sense of beauty the writer is well aware: sheer nobility of thought does not suffice for art: no one would dream of calling Kant an artist. If Browning fails of quite the loftiest heights in the hierarchy of poets it is through inadequate aesthetic satisfaction. Yet surely it is also true that noble matter is no less essential to the real artist than beautiful form. Of two equally beautiful pictures or poems or novels, the one recording trivial facts, the other enshrining noble thoughts, in the name of conscience and common-sense is not the latter the greater art and he that wrote or painted it the greater artist? Given equal beauty reached through technical perfection, is not a Schumann greater than a Gounod, a Burne-Jones than a Tadema, a Wordsworth than a Swinburne, a Kingsley than a Smollett?

Nay, are not all novels written,—as all conscious actions

* Here too it will be convenient to mention a contemporary of Miss Mitford's—Theodore Hook, the renowned wit, who besides his comic short stories, met with some success as a novelist, as in *Jack Brag*, a satire of the tuft-hunting to which its author himself was somewhat addicted.

† 1765–1849.

done, by reasonable beings,—‘with a purpose?’ It is surely, then, the height of absurdity to say that novels like Miss Edgeworth’s with a good purpose,—that is for the betterment of the world,—are for that very reason inferior to novels with a less good purpose, *e.g.* Smollett’s, whose purpose was the world’s amusement, or Defoe’s, whose purpose was its lucrative mystification.

Is there, then, no ground for the prejudice against novels ‘with a purpose’ like Miss Edgeworth’s moral tales? Assuredly there is. In all supreme art the purpose of the world’s betterment is there, but it is concealed. It animates the whole, gives life to every part, itself unseen. As the soul is to the body, so should the purpose be to the novel, the secret principle of life. In Miss Edgeworth’s novels the soul becomes visible and in that very process ceases to be a soul.

For all that, her tales, though not the greatest art, contain much wholesome thought, and shew very considerable powers of characterisation, as well as an especial and just appreciation of the qualities of the Irish peasantry.*

Godwin’s now almost forgotten romances shewed a strange bloodless ability; Marryat’s vigorous tales of marine adventure were a notable feature in the literature of the time; and there are other names that suggest themselves.

But we now pass to the consideration of those two great rivals who, together with a woman no less great, form the triad that is in the field of the novel the chief glory of the middle century:—Thackeray and Dickens. THACKERAY† was educated at the Charterhouse and Cambridge, and after some European travel settled down to a busy literary life. He was a man of the most amiable personality, and if he lashed the vices of the day with unsparing hand, it was always at the impulse of a genuine love for his fellow-men. His first and most famous work is almost overburdened with satire: we guess now and then that he who wields the lash has really a kind heart, but it is impossible to help wishing that there were more of the heart and less of the lash. Becky Sharp is, however impossible, a marvellous creation: in her centres the main human interest of the book, for Dobbin is quite intolerable, and that ineffably stupid Amelia is perhaps the least

* In this connection may be mentioned two other brilliant exponents of the Irish character, similar in name and fame, Lover and Lever. The latter was undoubtedly the abler, though both possessed a rare fund of distinctively Irish humour. The author of *Jack Hinton* is especially noticeable for a fine racy *élan* by which the reader is quite carried away into following with breathless interest and amusement the adventures of his dashing heroes and lovely heroines.

† 1811—1863.

interesting heroine in any great novel. The most natural character is undeniably Rawdon Crawley, and it is with rare art that the author secures first our toleration and then our affection for a person in so many respects unamiable.

Artistically *Vanity Fair*, and still more the succeeding *Pendennis* and *Esmond*, shew retrogression from the model set in *Tom Jones* of a central gradually-developing plot, which binds incident to incident and makes the tale a living organism. The connecting force is here, as in Smollett, merely the personality of the main characters,—united in Thackeray's case with the all-pervading personality of the author. The *Newcomes*—which however comes just outside our period—is the novel in which many think that Thackeray reached his highest level, exceeding, as it does, the rest in genial feeling, sympathetic plot and natural portraiture. The writer knows of few more truly pathetic chapters in literature than the one that relates 'How Colonel Newcome sold his horses,' where that most amiable if somewhat over-elaborated hero (who financially mistaken, yet makes his most serious mistake, like the father in *Harry Richmond*, in trying to manage the matrimonial arrangements of his son,) says Good-bye and goes back to India.

Before leaving Thackeray a word may well be said of his delightful contribution to children's literature, the story of the *Rose and the Ring*. In delicacy of humour and charm of manner the tale can hardly be equalled: Prince Giglio, Bulbo, Angelica, and the good Rosalba,—so prettily drawn by the author,—are all singularly happy. With the *Water Babies* and *Alice in Wonderland* it deserves to rank as one of the most exquisite books for children ever written.

CHARLES DICKENS,* perhaps an even greater writer, rose from the ranks, having been factory-hand, office-boy, and reporter, before, at the age of 24, he burst into almost unparalleled popularity by the publication of the *Pickwick Papers*.† Henceforward, until his death in 1870, he wrote almost uninterruptedly, *Oliver Twist* following hard on *Pickwick*, *Nicholas Nickleby* on *Oliver*, and each being received with acclamation. A year before our period ends appeared the finest of all his works, the partly autobiographical *David Copperfield*.

It is as a humourist that Dickens will survive. His attempts at serious characterisation meet with very varying success. The public that can shed tears with Dorrit or with Little Nell has been mercifully dwindling ever since his time:

* 1812—1870.

† Here, as elsewhere throughout, acknowledgment is due to Shaw's *English Literature*, of which in the necessary absence of more detailed books of reference the writer has constantly made use.

his pathos is too often strained, false and melodramatic : a true note is only very occasionally sounded.* His plots—with some few exceptions, among which the writer has always been inclined to reckon *Great Expectations*—are clumsily put together, this no doubt being largely due to the monthly form in which so many of his works appeared. But his humour is unapproachable. He had a marvellous eye for noting the peculiarities of men and women, and a no less marvellous power of their description and humorous exaggeration. Sam Weller, Dick Swiveller, Mrs. Nickleby, Captain Cuttle, Squeers, Chadband, Mrs. Gamp and Pecksniff—what string of names in all the world has caused more genuine merriment? Clearly defined types all of them, if none quite natural, yet all bearing sufficient analogy to actual humanity to keep us always well in touch with them. It is not pretended that even the humour of Dickens did not have its limitations. Never particularly refined, although never more than harmlessly vulgar, it is always quite obvious and does not rise to the height, as it does not sink to the depths, of an Aristophanes or a Swift. But within its limits it is simply masterful. And the secret of its power seems to be Dickens' supreme gift of wide human sympathy. With little knowledge or appreciation of the more remote aspects of human character, the more delicate of our instincts, and intimate of our thoughts,—Dickens had an almost unequalled sympathy with the primal instincts of human nature. A man was hungry;—whether beggar or gentleman, virtuous or criminal, Dickens felt for him and makes us feel for him. It is only of the middle and lower classes that Dickens treats : it is only of their obvious deeds and thoughts and feelings that his novels bear record. Yet his truth to the central facts of human nature, his wide sympathy, and his glorious gift of humour make him a universal favourite alike with learned and ignorant, old and young, rich and poor. His style is often slipshod ; serviceable and picturesque when the author is among the men and things and thoughts with which he is at home, turgid when he wishes to be dignified, and tawdry when he tries to be romantic. Yet are such defects more than forgivable in one who combined the fresh humanity of Fielding, the sentiment of Sterne, and a drollery far richer than Smollett's, with a moral purpose, though fortunately somewhat less obtrusive than Miss Edgeworth's, yet fully as real.

* *Dombey & Son* (in the opinion of the writer) contains some genuine pathos, while in other respects it merits a rank scarcely less high than *David Copperfield*. Poor sick Paul when the dance comes at school and Florence arrives to win all hearts, has always seemed to him a truly pathetic little figure.

There could hardly be a greater contrast than that between the points of view of Thackeray and Dickens, the one in kindly cynicism lightly satirizing life, with frequent lash at some insidious vice; the other, while attacking with vigorous if somewhat unchastened sarcasm the more manifest injustices of the time, yet generally content to emphasize the obvious goodness of the good side of life, and paint the smiles and tears that our common joys and sorrows draw from all. Thackeray seems to say: 'Look at the best of you, how mean you are'; Dickens: 'Look at the worst of us, how human we are.' And the world wisely loves Dickens best.

EDWARD BULWER,* Lord Lytton, stands on altogether a lower level than Thackeray and Dickens. As versatile a *littérateur* as Defoe himself, he had neither that author's supreme naturalistic art nor Fielding's large hearted optimism,—still less the chivalrous cynicism of Thackeray or the genial humanity of the author of *Pickwick*. He resembled Scott in his passion for romance, and he was not unlike him in his skill in working on the imaginations of his readers by aid of the strange and unusual. But he had not Scott's nobility of mind: the latter's romance was steeped in good sense, Lytton's in sensualism. Occasionally rising,—as in *Harold* or sometimes in *Rienzi*,—almost to the height of Scott, he more often sinks to the level of 'Ouida.' His passion lacks conviction, his thoughts depth, his descriptions truth. In his use of strong colours and misplaced effects, he may be likened to a scene-painter endeavouring to introduce his methods into the painting of actual pictures. About his dialogues and situations there is much of the "tiresome falsity" of the stage, and the glare of the footlights is over the bulk of his writing.† At the same time he was a writer of great imaginative powers, and an exceptionally brilliant fancy, and has had considerable influence—not always good—on the romantic minds of youthful generations. Of his imaginative powers *The Coming Race* may be taken as affording a favourable idea, while of his less theatrical novels that entitled *My Novel* is generally considered the most successful.‡

* 1805—1873.

† The theatricality of Lytton would naturally be less out of place upon the stage; his actual dramatic works met with considerable success. The *Lady of Lyons*, despite much tawdry language and false sentiment, is still popular, and *Money* and *Richelieu* continue to hold the stage.

‡ The writer must however record his protest at the, it seems to him, inartistic manner in which the author, in episodic chapters, continually takes his readers into his confidence, and explains to them what he is going to make his characters do next, and why. Surely this being taken behind, and shewn all the strings by which the puppets are worked, is not intrinsically a sufficient enjoyment to compensate for the loss of interest in the characters of the novel which can hardly fail to ensue.

Bearing some analogy to Lytton, BENJAMIN DISRAELI* had also as a novelist distinctive merits and demerits of his own. If he fell short of the author of *The last days of Pompeii* in dramatic invention, he considerably excelled him in epigrammatic force. There is more original thought, daring speculation, and sparkling wit in Disraeli, but on the contrary his work is even more self-conscious and artificial than that of his distinguished contemporary. Although *D'Alroy* proved him possessed of a deep veneration and ambition for the ancient race to which he belonged, he was on the whole singularly wanting in any firm and well-thought out enthusiasm, which might mould his writing and his action. Vague and visionary ideas, sounding but somewhat hollow patriotisms, and striking but somewhat uncertain sentiments, all this,—combined with his brilliant political position,—induced a popularity for his novels that has not been sustained. He lacked serious view alike of life and of his art.†

A very different type of man was CHARLES KINGSLEY‡ of whom we must next speak, the Eversley rector of blameless character, liberal views and enthusiastic humanity, who combined the religious principles of F. D. Maurice with an English devotion to physical exercise, and a divine sympathy with the cause of the oppressed.

Of his novels *Hereward the Wake*, *Yeast*, and *Two Years Ago*§ are tales of sustained interest, told with vigour and instinct with nobility, while *Westward Ho*, *Alton Locke*, and *Hypatia* reach an even higher level. Outside the pages of Scott it is hard to find an historical novel of equal merit with *Westward Ho*:|| Kingsley has entered thoroughly into the spirit of the time with which he deals, and the result is a narrative of vivid interest and substantial truth, tinged

* 1804—1881.

† It will here be convenient to notice—if 'English' may be taken to cover the novelists of New England—one of the few distinguished literary men that America has produced, Nathaniel Hawthorne, author of *The Scarlet Letter*. It is a novel of extraordinary originality and power; simple, almost bare, in its outlines, and austere in its style. The introduction of the supernatural element in that uncomfortable child is a more than doubtful artistic gain, but apart from this it is hard to find a flaw in this most impressive novel, great in its simplicity and truth.

‡ 1819—1875.

§ This, the more popular of his two novels dealing with modern life, seems of somewhat unequal merit. It is full of life and interest, and the picture of the pestilence-stricken village is admirable: the story is however somewhat disjointed, and the agnostic hero's mean suspicion of Grace unnatural.

|| *Westward Ho*! appeared in 1855, and is therefore properly outside our period, but it seems to the writer that no attempt at adequate criticism can be made of an author some of whose works fall within the prescribed area, unless those works also are considered which fall without it—though any notice of such works has purposely been made as brief as possible.

with a fine glamour of romance. *Alton Locke* is an intensely eloquent appeal for a wretched section of humanity, which has borne and will yet bear good fruit. The story is in some respects unsatisfying, but the inspired fury of the attack against a crying evil, and the powerful way in which the facts are marshalled in the narrative, till the mind of the reader shrinks before a state of things almost too horrible to be conceived, render it in many ways a great work. *Hypatia*, one of the earlier novels, is also one of the most generally popular. In it the author's liberal sympathies are exhibited in very pleasing form, and the heroine and Raphael Ben Ezra—that delightful scene with the dog and her puppies is worth pages of Disraeli's epigrams—are perhaps the best drawn of all his characters.

Kingsley's defects are obvious. He was a partisan, a social reformer and a liberal churchman of a very nineteenth century type: these he is in all his novels. He cannot, and does not wish to, divest himself of his personality and his century, whatever be the scenes or the ages which he is describing. He would sometimes gain by greater restraint, and his valour might more often be tempered by discretion. His style is straightforward and fresh, but not infrequently suffers from excess of vigour. His merits are not less on the surface. Every page he wrote is marked by a human sympathy, if less wide than that of Dickens, infinitely more noble; by a chivalrous respect for women for which we can only seek parallel in *Sesame and Lilies*; by an honest, healthy, manly, love of all that is great and good and loveable in human life; and by a faith in God as simple as it is sincere. Kingsley is not one of the greatest novelists: the voice of posterity will not rank him with Fielding and Scott, Thackeray and Dickens: but it would be hard to find a writer more consistently noble, or one more useful to his generation.

Something of Kingsley's honest enthusiasm for noble things and scorn of the base, combined with something of the less subtle side of Thackeray's power of satire, is to be found in their contemporary, CHARLES READE,* who also occasionally recalls Dickens in his simple sympathy with human nature and in the frequent infelicity of his style. Of his novels, *Never too late to mend* is at once the best known and the best; *The Cloister and the Hearth* is in some respects a powerful story, though marred by grave defects: *Christie Johnstone* is in many ways a charming little study, while *Peg Woffington* gives striking expression—by means of the career of his heroine—to the dislike of the necessary shams and falsities of the stage which must be occasionally felt by all honest and true natures.

* 1814—1884.

And honest and true Charles Reade certainly was: his personages may be but unreal shadows, their dialogue stilted and insufferably stagey, their action at times inexplicable; his plots may be melodramatic, while his style may in its jerky eccentricity resemble Sterne's, without the dainty oddity that was attractive in the earlier writer. Yet on the whole his feeling is true and sound; and his not infrequently effective situations, his picturesque suggestions of noble character, his broad humanity, and that hearty boyish manner of his, may still ensure his novels many readers.

In the same year with Kingsley, was born that great woman novelist who completes the triad above referred to.* But the fact that *Amos Barton*, her first essay in fiction, did not appear until 1857, precludes George Eliot from consideration here.

Three years however before her birth there first saw light an authoress scarcely less remarkable, in the person of the Yorkshire clergyman's daughter, CHARLOTTE BRONTË.† Upon the short and gloomy lives of her and her gifted sisters it is here impossible to dwell: Mrs. Gaskell's delightful biography is well known. Suffice it to say that Charlotte assuredly 'learned in sorrow' what she so powerfully taught. There are few more astounding things in all literary history than the way in which the genius of 'Currer Bell' ripened to maturity amid such uncongenial surroundings, and the unerring instinct with which her strong imagination enabled her truly to envisage sights and scenes and sides of life of which she had had no experience.

Not often has a more original book been published than *Jane Eyre*. Most great authors have had their literary models: Charlotte Brontë had none. An ardent admirer of Thackeray, she owed him little indeed in style or thought: Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, Scott, Dickens, which of these is she most unlike? If in her straightforward and skilful use of matter-of-fact detail she occasionally recall Defoe, or if in her analysis of human passion she at times suggest comparison with Richardson, the names are no sooner mentioned than is felt how deep the gulf of difference that parts either author from 'Currer Bell,' to whom the sordid realism of the one and the elaborate sentimentality of the other were equally foreign. Seldom has passion been portrayed with such burning truth as that which glows in the pages of *Jane Eyre*. The characters are firmly drawn and stand out clearly, the simple but effective plot is artistically evolved, the interest is throughout admirably sustained. Perhaps in all fiction

* v. p. 19.

† 1816—1855.

there is no scene nobler or more replete with pathos than the meeting of Jane with the blind Rochester, after the trial has passed: it is as fine as the great parallel scene in Mrs. Browning's masterpiece.* its restraint scarcely less noticeable than its power.†

With Charlotte Brontë we seem to pass into the world of to-day. Much of Dickens and Thackeray has already become old fashioned, while the aims and ambitions of the writer of *Jane Eyre* are still prominent aims and ambitions of thoughtful persons.‡ "Conventionality is not morality": we find in the stirring preface to that work: "self-righteousness is not religion. To attack the first is not to assail the last. To pluck the mask from the face of the Pharisee is not to lift an impious hand to the Crown of Thorns." There is a modern ring, a note of actuality about all this. Modern, too, is the choice of the central position round which the novel is woven, involving the question of the violability of the marriage vow. If Kingsley's novels herald the modern tone of liberality in religious thought, Charlotte Brontë's anticipate the modern desire for enquiry into social institutions.

Very noticeable, however, is the decision at which our authoress arrives. If she questions the sacredness of marriage and the necessity of obeying social ordinances, she does so but to revert with conviction to the traditional morality. In the heroine's hour of temptation, when nought but a social tradition stands between her and the man she loves, this is how she is made to argue with herself: "The

* Aurora's meeting with blind Romney. Another curious parallel between the two works is the dramatically interrupted marriage in each.

† Such restraint was unknown to her sister Emily; *Wuthering Heights* being an unrestrained story of unrestrained beings, more like beasts than men, entirely at the mercy of their passions. Nor does Charlotte herself consistently shew such restraint. Much of the effect of *Shirley* is lost owing to the savage fury with which Mr. Donne and his fellow curates are attacked. Like many earnest people our authoress had little sense of humour: the real satirist deals his clean and fatal blow and leaves the bodies of his enemies deftly slain upon the field; but with such fury does Charlotte Brontë assail these unfortunate curates that she completely misses her effect; their corpses it is true she leaves upon the field, but hacked into unrecognizableness!

‡ E.g. on the subject of the position of woman: 'Women are supposed to be very calm generally, but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags.' (*Jane Eyre*.)

more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God, sanctioned by man. Laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation: they are for such moments as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour."*

With Charlotte Brontë our period ends. The genius of the even greater George Eliot was about to rise; who in her greatest works, *Adam Bede*, *Silas Marner*, and *Scenes from Clerical Life*, exemplified the theory of life accepted by 'Currer Bell': that we were made for effort and endurance, to the slow development of character. If in later life her writing was clouded over with less noble thought, herein she but suffered with her generation. The discoveries of fresh physical facts had startled the world out of reasonable views of life: continued discoveries have since been further unsettling men's opinions. "Conventionality is not morality," wrote Charlotte Brontë, but now it is becoming increasingly necessary to point out that mere *unconventionality* is not morality either. Popular 'science' has brought with it wide-spread materialism, which has exerted on literature its necessary baneful effect. The recent writers who have achieved popularity have, as a rule, either by sensational adventure and *bizarre* incident compensated for poverty of thought and remissness of style, or stunted their readers' spiritual perceptions by unimaginative realism enlivened by dirt.

Not but what we have giants among us yet. In George Meredith we have one that can only be compared with the greatest; and should we seek peers for Diana and Clara and the Princess Ottilia it could only be in the pages of Shakespeare. Yet his most devoted disciples must wish in their hearts that he had more of the clearness which should surely be part of the novelist's—as Mr. Stopford Brooke says it should be of the poet's—religion. Moreover even in his thought is reflected the uncertainty of the time. He derides the educational theory of life,† but without proposing any better.

The novelist is become at once the philosopher, the poet, entertainer and preacher of the people. The novel, it has been said,‡ has, like Aaron's rod, swallowed up all other kinds of literature. It is certainly the branch of literature

* Cf. the very powerful scene in a recent novel—by a brilliant disciple of George Meredith—entitled *Violet Moses*, where the heroine passes after a great struggle in triumph through a similar temptation.

† See a well-known passage in *Richard Feverel*.

‡ Essays of H. H. Lancaster.

which—at any rate after the press—has at the present day the most influence on life. The late Professor Jowett in a familiar passage* contemplates a time when the passion of love shall no longer hold its dominant interest as a theme of thought. But of this since there are as yet no signs, those who are real in their belief in moral progress, who think that there is a good order in things, and have high hopes of human nature, strain their eyes far forward for the great novelist that must come. We look back on Fielding and that renowned band of whom it has here been written, and we see that each was full and satisfying for his age. For his age, but not in like degree for ours. We want a voice of our own, as supreme a novelist as Shakespeare was a dramatist, who shall, while with greatest truth portraying life and character, at the same time be inspired with no uncertain views of existence,—old theories built fresh on the wider facts that modern learning has revealed.

The gaining of the whole world and the losing of the soul cannot of a surety last many years longer. There seem signs of a nobler age; of an age when the pride of worth shall have followed the pride of birth and the lust of wealth to its grave; when an honest and more thoughtful race, reared beneath a greater evenhood† of conditions of life, shall have learned to receive the boon of existence with humbler hearts and a less consistent selfishness; when there being alike less poverty and less affluence, mankind, no longer forced to starve out his soul to avoid the one or to choke it to obtain the other, may struggle on with more hope and with more success in the appointed conflict with sin and pain. That age will find expression in the Shakespeare that is to come.

Meanwhile let us rejoice in the good we have, nor in waiting for the radiance yet unseen, close our eyes to the broken lights that are with us even now: the manly brilliance of George Meredith, Thomas Hardy's power of passion, and the bold imagination of the creator of Mr. Hyde; remembering, too, that when tired of modern ways and words we can always dip gratefully into our older authors; whether we prefer the detailed romance of *Clarissa*, the boisterous humanity of *Tom Jones*, the glorious humour of the *Pickwick Papers*, the chivalry of *Ivanhoe*, or the sweet simplicity of the *Vicar of Wakefield*.

* In the introduction to his translation of the *Republic*.

† If it be allowed us to revive a good but withered English word, to express somewhat less than *equality*; since this latter word would in such a passage seem to connote socialism and communism. Equality of condition is, thank God, impossible; but evenhood thereof is surely a consummation devoutly to be wished.

